DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 170 415 UD 019 370

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TITLE Financing the Education of the Black Child: A Survey of 30 Predominantly Minority School Districts.
PUB DATE 7 Apr 79
NOTE 9p.; Paper prepared for the annual state conference of the New Jersey Association of Black Education (6th, New Jersey, April 6-7, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Finance; Educationally Disadvantaged; Elementary Secondary Education; Expenditure Per Student; Federal Aid; *Low Income Counties; *Minority Groups; *Minority Role; *School District Spending; School Taxes; Socioeconomic Background; State Aid
IDENTIFIERS *New Jersey

ABSTRACT

This document reports on a survey of 30 school districts (five percent of all New Jersey school districts) which contain over two-thirds of the State's total minority enrollment. Twenty-three of the 30 districts are classified as urban communities and over 98 percent of the minority students live in them. Property taxes are the primary source of funds for all public services. Communities with low property values generally offer marginal, if not inadequate, municipal and educational services and in addition rely heavily on State and Federal aid. Some of New Jersey's major urban centers count on such aid to underwrite as much as 50 to 75 percent of their municipal and educational costs. Most of the districts in the survey are low socioeconomic level communities. It is noted that although money alone will not solve the educational problems in these communities, adequate funding is necessary. It is suggested that minority professionals and interest groups must become involved in the policy making arena. (Author/MC)

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FINANCING THE EDUCATION OF THE BLACK CHILD: A SURVEY OF 30 PREDOMINANTLY MINORITY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Prepared For

THE SIX ANNUAL STATE CONFERENCE
of the
NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF BLACK EDUCATORS

April 6,7, 1979

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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April, 1979

UD019370

In 1977-1978 there were approximately 345,116 minority students enrolled in New Jersey elementary and secondary schools. Approximately 233,124 minority students were in school districts where the minority enrollment was 50% or more. These predominantly minority districts are listed on Table 1.

The 30 districts listed comprise less than 5% of all New Jersey school districts, but contain approximately 68% of the State's total minority enrollment. The majority of the 30 districts (23 of 30) are classified as urban communities. Over 98% of the 233,124 minority students in the 30 districts surveyed reside in urban communities.

Over three fourths of the students in the survey (77.88%) reside in Northern New Jersey. These 181,552 students in 14 school districts are clustered in Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Passaic, and Union Counties, the most heavily urbanized areas in the State.

FINANCING PUBLIC SERVICES

The assessed value of a community's taxable property is an indicator of that community's wealth. Property taxes are the primary source of funds for all public services, particularly the public schools. Communities that possess a great amount of property wealth can offer residents more and higher quality municipal and educational services. Communities that possess a limited or low amount of property wealth generally offer marginal, if not inadequate, municipal and educational services and in addition must rely very heavily on various types of State and Federal aid. Some of New Jersey's major urban centers count on State and Federal aid to underwrite as much as 50% to 75% of their municipal and educational costs. If these cities had to rely solely on their local tax base, they could not function.

The equalized valuation per pupil is a measure of school district wealth, and in all but three of the districts surveyed the equalized valuation per pupil

was below the State average of $78,164. Most New Jersey urban districts, particularly the major urban centers, are property poor; their tax base is either extremely limited or extremely low. Given this, the capacity of the cities to generate revenues from local property taxes is a function of the size and value of the local tax base.

In general, the tax rates in the districts surveyed were above the State average, particularly in the urban areas. The only exceptions to this pattern were two small rural school districts, Mannington and Woodbine. In the major urban centers, tax rates ranged from 30% (Elizabeth) to 129% (East Orange) above the State average. Most of the districts in the survey are required to levy a higher than average tax rate on a lower than average property base. In terms of their fiscal capacity, these predominantly minority school districts are truly "disadvantaged".

RESOURCES AND EXPENDITURES

Most of the districts in the survey are low socio-economic level communities. The New Jersey Department of Education uses the District Factor Score as a measure of socio-economic level. The major elements in the factor score are the district's: (1) educational background, (2) occupational background, (3) per capita income, (4) poverty level, and (5) unemployment rate. The socio-economic groupings range from group A, the lowest SES rating, to group J, the highest SES rating. If SES is accepted as a valid indicator of disadvantagement, all but three of the districts surveyed are disadvantaged because of their low socio-economic level.

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are harder and costlier to educate than students from middle and upper socio-economic levels. However, only 13 of the districts surveyed spend above the State average of $1906 per pupil on education. Property poor districts, especially cities, are caught in a bind. Their students

may be more costly to educate due to adverse environmental circumstances, but the community may lack the tax base necessary to raise additional money for the schools. The choices are often between cutting police, fire and other municipal services, or spending more local funds on education. Traditionally, it has been the education budget that suffered and absorbed reductions.

PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT

The level of pupil achievement in a district can be considered as both an indicator of educational quality and an indicator of educational need. It is the perception of both the public at large and an ever increasing group of professionals that poor student performance on competency tests means poor educational quality in the district's programs. Poor student performance is an indicator of educational needs. In all but 9 of the districts surveyed, more than half (50% +) are considered below the minimum statewide standard in reading, math, or both. Keep in mind that over two thirds of all minority students in the State are enrolled in the districts surveyed. The implications of this are frightening. The prospect of a large pool of undereducated, unskilled, unemployed minority adults could become a painful reality in the immediate future. There is no question about it, the status of minorities in public education in New Jersey is worsening.

A PARTIAL SOLUTION

Approximately 25% of all New Jersey elementary and secondary school students are from Black, Hispanic, and other minority groups. Two thirds of New Jersey's minority students live and attend school in property poor communities with extremely low revenue generating capacities. In general, the performance of students from these communities as measured by tests such as the New Jersey Basic Skills Tests and the College Basic Skills Placement Test is consistently below average. State aid to education has benefitted wealthier suburbs more than central cities in New Jersey and there is general agreement that cities are unable to obtain the large amounts of money

that are needed to provide adequate educational services.

Money alone will not solve the educational problems in the cities. However, adequate funding is a necessary, if not sufficient condition. Adequate funds are central to any attempts to improve education for minorities. However, State legislators and educational policy makers do not consider minorities and central cities a priority in their scheme of things. Both the legislature and the ranks of educational policy makers are dominated by suburban interests.

Minority professionals and interest groups are conspicuously absent from the discussions and debates that take place in the policy making arena. Non-minority interests are well represented by a number of professional associations which make it a point to express their positions on various issues. Too few minority professionals take public positions on issues that affect minorities. Too few minority professionals testify at public hearings on educational issues and make their positions known to educational and legislative policy makers.

Minority professional associations and interest groups must "go public". They must write position papers, testify at public hearings, and monitor significant public meetings in the legislature and selected departments of State government. Minority professionals need to continue to meet with members of State government and the legislature, but be aware that to do this alone without creating a public presence, without being "visible",is to be effectively cut off and isolated. The view in Trenton is that no broad based minority advocates exist, with the exception of the New Jersey Education Reform Project. This must change, and the International Year of the Child is the perfect time to begin. Minority professionals and minority organizations must attempt to bring about positive changes by concentrating on influencing the policy making process.

If a variation of the "Triage" concept is operating in the minds of New Jersey's legislators and educational policy makers, the current state of affairs, i.e., the

underfunding, understaffing, and other problems related to the education of minorities, may be acceptable. The plight of the 25% minority can be rationalized or explained away rather easily if one is prone to emphasizing and concentrating upon the 75% majority for whom the system generally works.

Minority professionals can play an important part in "righting the balance" and effecting solutions to the educational problems that plague minorities. Our children are suffering miserably. Things are getting worse, not better, and time is running out.

NEW JERSEY SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH 50% OR MORE MINORITY ENROLLMENT

District	Number Minority Enrollment	% Minority Enrollment	Expenditures	1977 Equalized Valuation/Pupil	1977 Equalized Tax Rate	Achievement**	DFG	Community Type
Atlantic City	6,492	75.2%	$1431	$55,396	6.75	36.63%	A	U
Asbury Park	2,835	80.7%	2127	37,654	6.26	31.31%	A	U
Camden	17,685	88.9%	1928	21,993	4.53	38.54%	A	U
East Orange	13,204	99.3%	1693	33,464	7.63	48.99%	A	U
Fairfield Twp.	955	82.0%	1379	23,174	4.07	48.10%	A	R
Hoboken	5,123	75.1%	1824	27,654	5.47	38.96%	A	U
Irvington	4,949	59.6%	1600	52,351	5.08	51.47%	A	U
Jersey City	26,647	76.1%	1741	35,774	5.96	48.95%	A	U
Mannington Twp.	123	52.8%	2238	71,604	2.61	73.37%	A	R
Newark	60,965	90.3%	1909	24,723	5.77	36.86%	A	U
Orange	3,819	87.7%	2060	42,819	6.89	47.93%	A	U
Passaic	6,407	78.6%	1621	44,592	3.70	43.31%	A	U
Paterson	22,438	82.3%	1406	29,668	3.76	40.31%	A	U
Salem City	1,076	50.9%	2349	30,646	3.31	34.62%	A	RC
Trenton	13,651	82.9%	1909	30,623	5.37	46.53%	A	U
Perty Amboy	4,482	75.3%	1820	61,699	3.11	52.63%	A	U
Union City	6,489	75.4%	1906	36,532	5.41	59.20%	A	U
West New York	4,991	78.4%	1684	37,656	5.76	75.17%	A	U-S
Woodbine	248	76.8%	1899	24,359	2.87	60.71%	A	RC
Bridgeton	2,599	57.6%	2060	28,554	3.84	70.69%	B	U
Egg Harbor City	269	54.3%	1632	49,626	3.63	60.48%	B	RCR
Elizabeth	10,091	67.7%	1995	70,740	3.93	58.58%	B	U
Lawnside	418	99.5%	1875	55,224	3.71	63.05%	B	S
Plainfield	7,975	90.7%	1821	47,873	4.01	50.61%	B	U
Pleasantville	2,202	74.1%	1767	35,129	4.94	35.73%	B	U-S
New Brunswick	4,301	86.2%	2317	77,784	3.78	56.38%	C	U
Red Bank	683	62.2%	2178	101,880	3.64	61.32%	D	U
Roselle Boro	1,439	50.3%	1971	87,793	3.22	62.49%	D	U-S
Englewood City	2,534	68.7%	2588	128,598	3.85	65.50%	G	U
Chesilhurst*	156	77.6%	$1794	$28,975	3.93	56.93%	*	R
STATE AVERAGE	(233,124)	25.0%	$1906	$78,164	3.01	70.0%		

*No DFG Calculation.
**Estimated % above minimum standard.

DFG MEANS, FOR DISTRICTS WITH 50% OR MORE MINORITY ENROLLMENT

DFG A	mean minority enrollment	:77.28%
	mean per pupil expenditure	:$1817.16
	mean student achievement	:48.08%
	mean equalized valuation/pupil	:$38,020
DFG B	mean minority enrollment	:73.98%
	mean per pupil expenditure	:$1857.33
	mean student achievement	:56.52%
	mean equalized valuation/pupil	:$47,858
DFG C	mean minority enrollment	:86.20
	mean per pupil expenditure	:$2317
	mean student achievement	:56.38%
	mean equalized valuation/pupil	:$77,784
DFG D	mean minority enrollment	:56.25%
	mean per pupil expenditure	:$2074.50
	mean student achievement	:61.91%
	mean equalized valuation/pupil	:$94,837
DFG G	mean minority enrollment	:68.7%
	mean per pupil expenditure	:$2588
	mean student achievement	:65.50%
	mean equalized valuation/pupil	:$128,598

DFG SCALE